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Lost Saint John's, Part 3: Lost – and Found? Sagatagan Shrines

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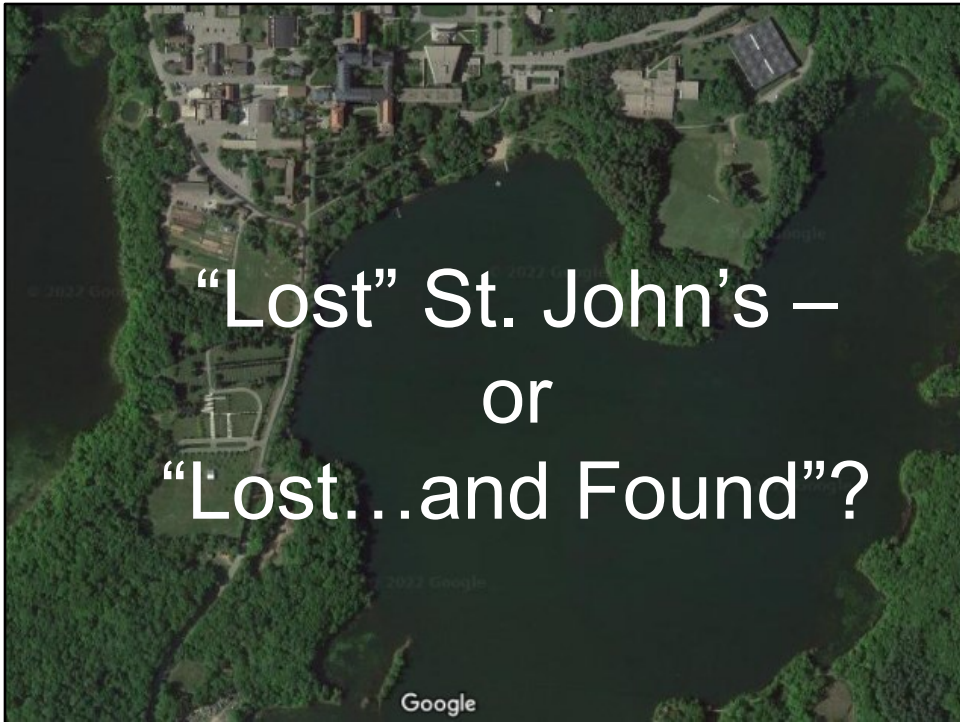
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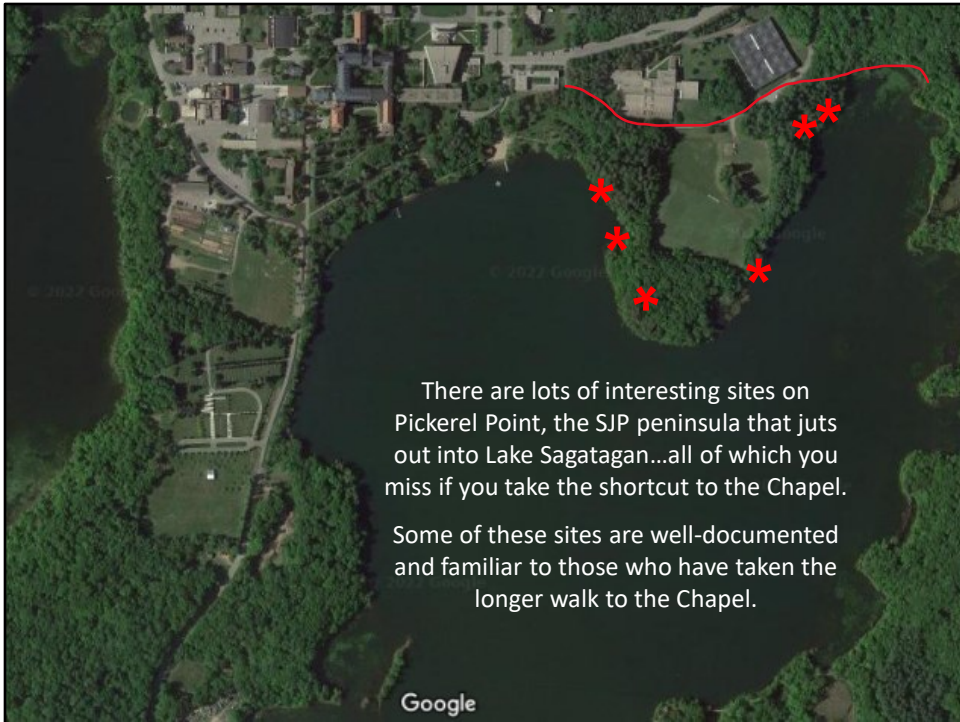
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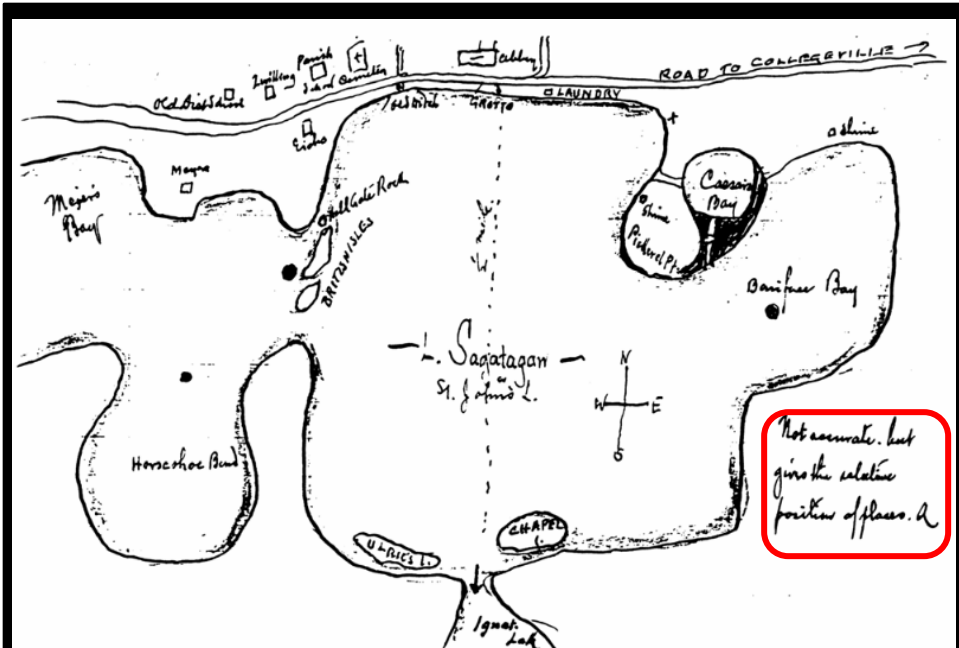
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Delivered to the SJU Administrative Assembly on March 16, 2022, “on location” at the Prep School.

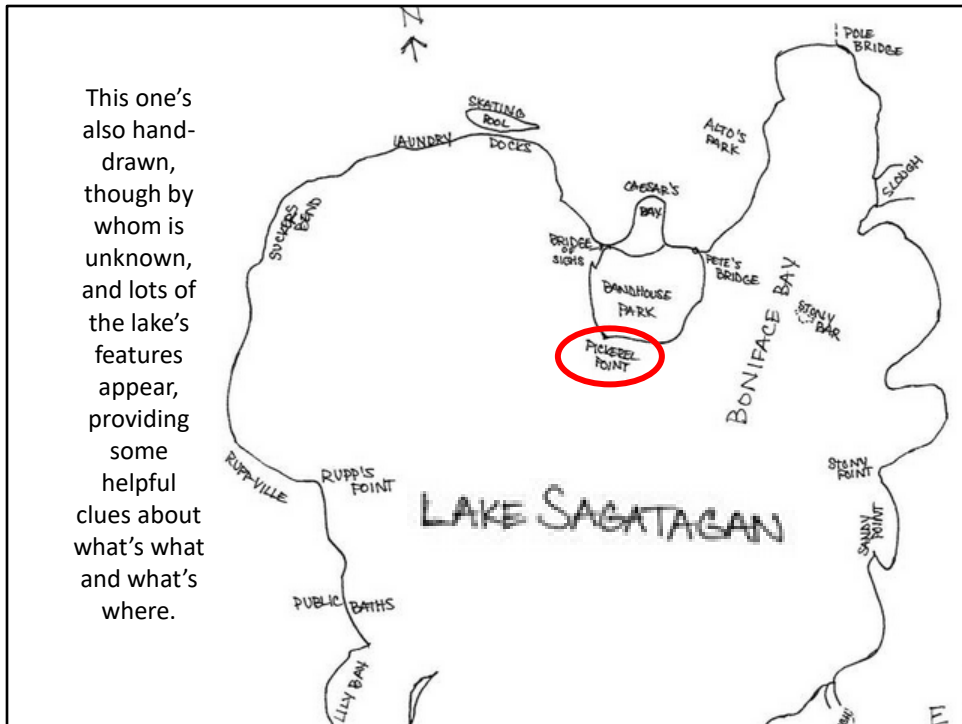


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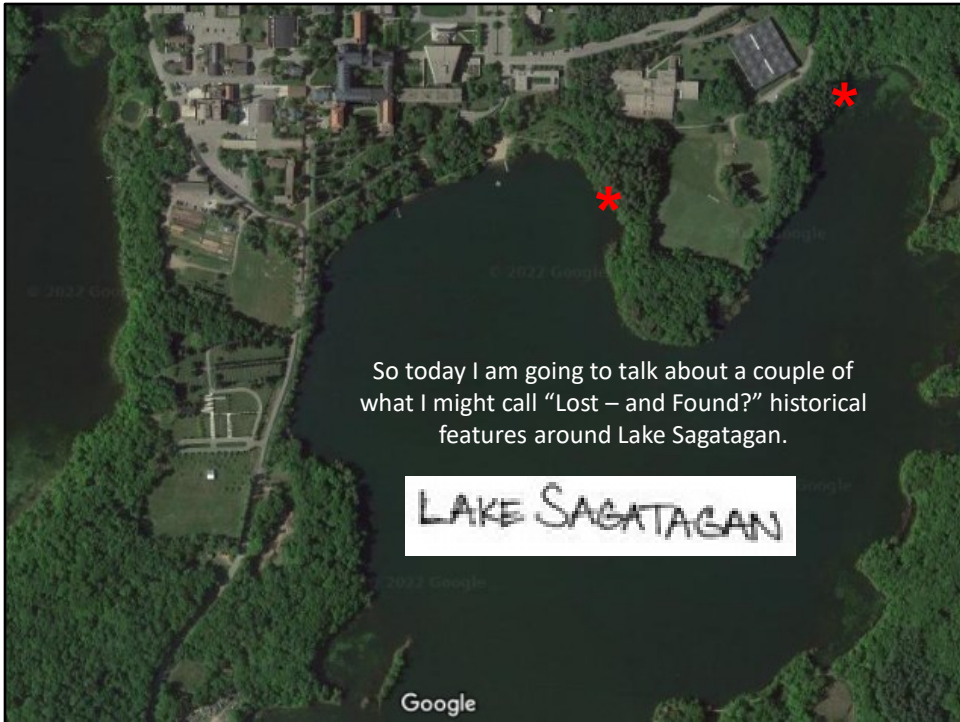


A couple of them show up on this early, but distorted, map by Alexis Hoffmann, which he notes is "not accurate, but gives the relative position of places."

p. 13 of Hoffmann's [Natural History of Collegeville](#) pdf (written 1926-1934)



Lake Sagatagan Map: Located: 2568:13 See <http://cdm.csbsju.edu/u/?/SJUArchives,4423> for a description of the names of features of Lake Sagatagan: Meinberg, Clodoald (Cloud), OSB. "Sagatagan Saga," Scriptorium, vol. 5, no. 2, Summer 1945, p. 25-38. <https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/1739>

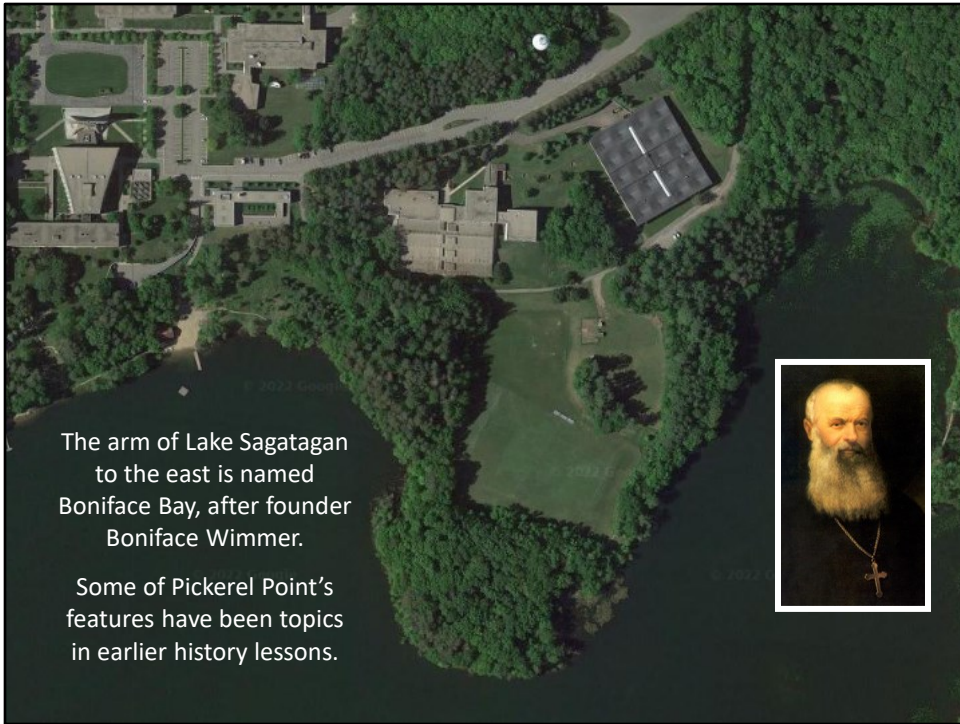


So today I am going to talk about a couple of what I might call "Lost – and Found?" historical features around Lake Sagatagan.

LAKE SAGATAGAN

Google

[Google Maps](https://www.google.com/maps/@45.5787345,-94.3909658,652m/data=!3m1!1e3?hl=en) <https://www.google.com/maps/@45.5787345,-94.3909658,652m/data=!3m1!1e3?hl=en>



The arm of Lake Sagatagan to the east is named Boniface Bay, after founder Boniface Wimmer.

Some of Pickerel Point's features have been topics in earlier history lessons.

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Boniface Wimmer portrait from a painting in the collection of St. Vincent's Archabbey, Pennsylvania.



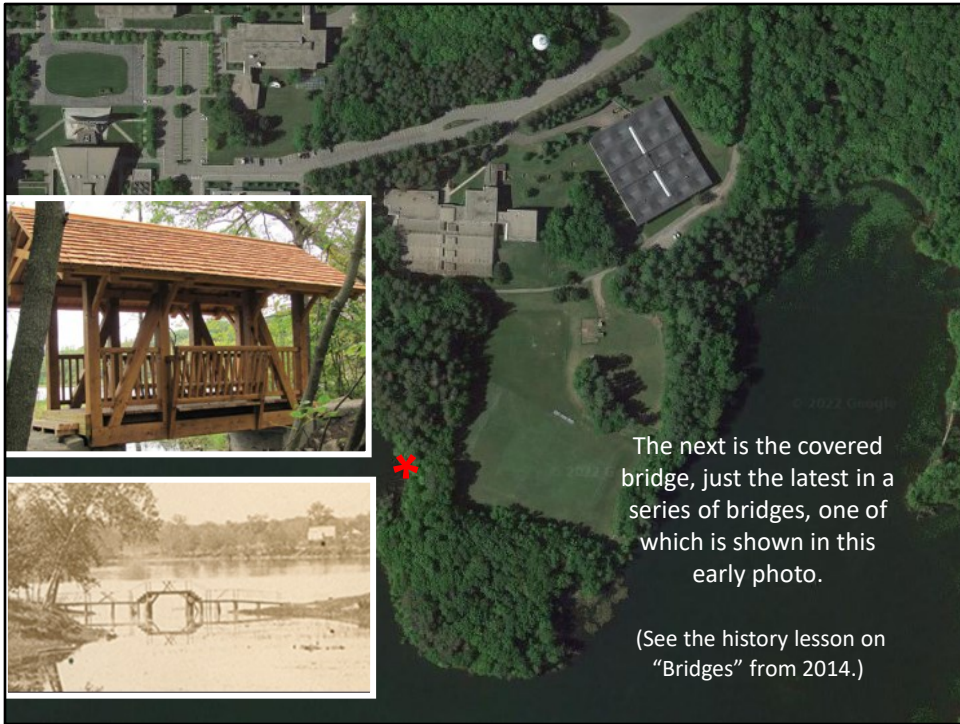
If you start the Chapel Walk at the beach trailhead, the first stopping point used to be Fr. Cornelius's crucifix, now preserved in the Monastery; nowadays you see in its place the statue of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha.

Both were featured in my "St. John's Statues" history lesson. (Previous history lessons are available on the Archives' websites or in Digital Commons.)

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1954 Yearbook – Cornelius Wittmann crucifix

Tekakwitha from <http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/5833>



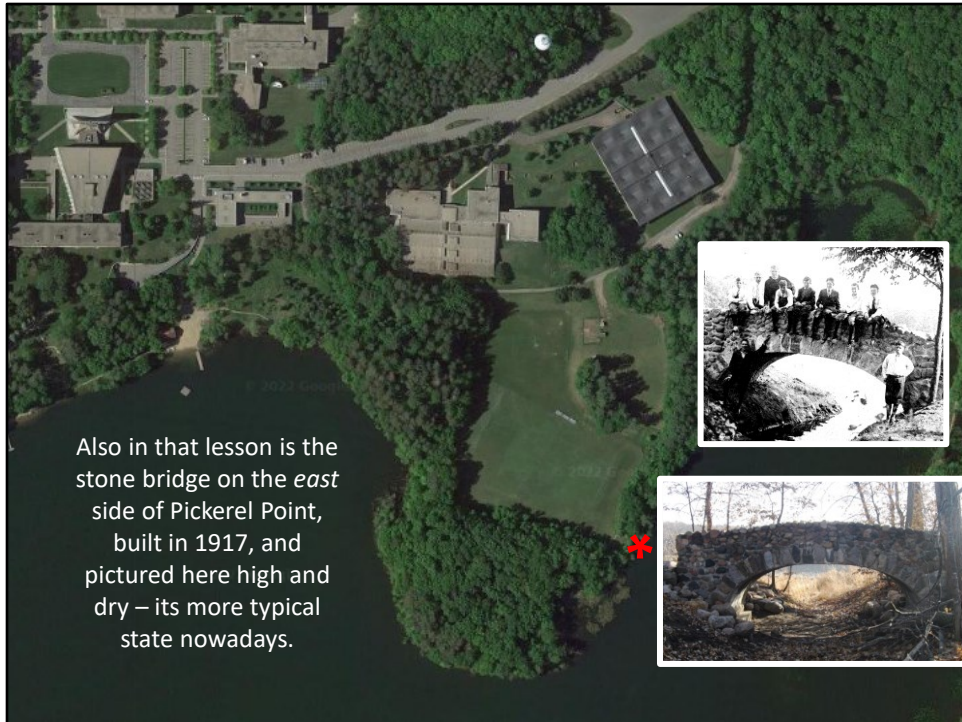
The next is the covered bridge, just the latest in a series of bridges, one of which is shown in this early photo.

(See the history lesson on "Bridges" from 2014.)

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"Caesar's Bridge – St. John's – 1888?" from the matted photographs collection in the SJU Archives

Covered bridge photo from.....



Also in that lesson is the stone bridge on the *east* side of Pickerel Point, built in 1917, and pictured here high and dry – its more typical state nowadays.

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“Caesar’s Bridge – St. John’s – 1888?” from the matted photographs collection in the SJU Archives

Covered bridge photo from 2016-17 Volume 16 Number 03 Abbey Banner Winter p.32

Historical photo of stone bridge:

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Bridges\Chapel walk bridge.jpg

2009 Stone bridge photo by the archivist,

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Bridges\from Chapel Walk

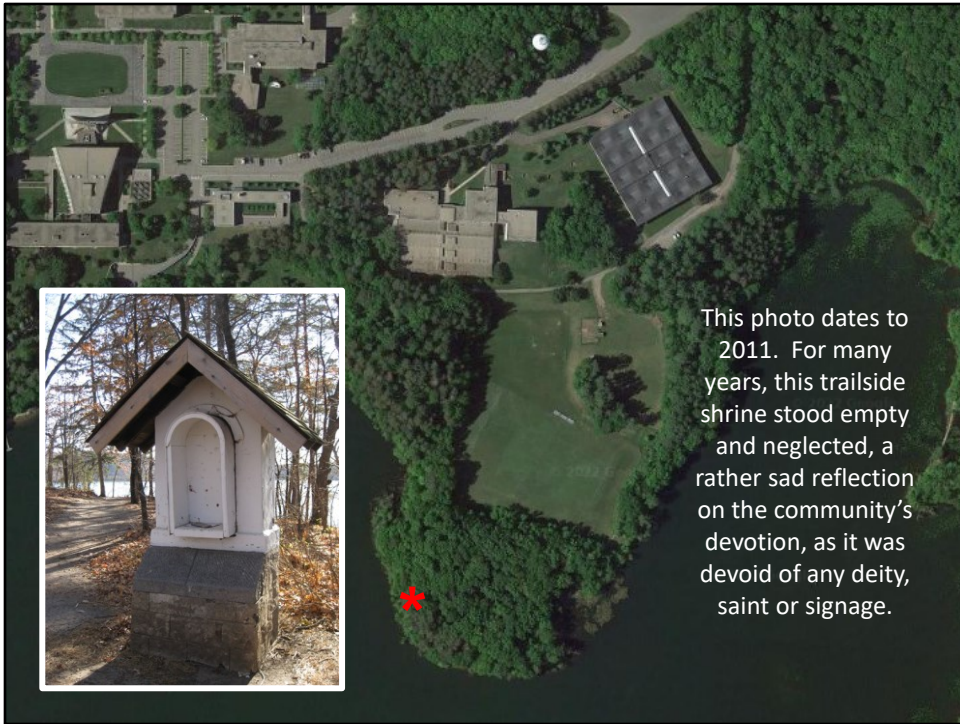
20091116 plr



But there are a couple of features on Pickerel Point that haven't been covered before in a history lesson.

One is familiar to Chapel hikers, though I'm guessing those of you who have been here for a few years have witnessed at least one of its transformations.

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651-756-9100



This photo dates to 2011. For many years, this trailside shrine stood empty and neglected, a rather sad reflection on the community's devotion, as it was devoid of any deity, saint or signage.

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Photo on left (empty) by the archivist Nov. 11, 2011

Photo on right by the archivist, April 19, 2019



* There were rumors of an attempt to renovate it, and something seemed to be underway when it looked like this in April 2019.

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[94.3909658,652m/data=!3m1!1e3?hl=en](https://www.google.com/maps/@45.5787345,-94.3909658,652m/data=!3m1!1e3?hl=en)

Photo on left (empty) by the archivist Nov. 11, 2011

Photo on right by the archivist, April 19, 2019

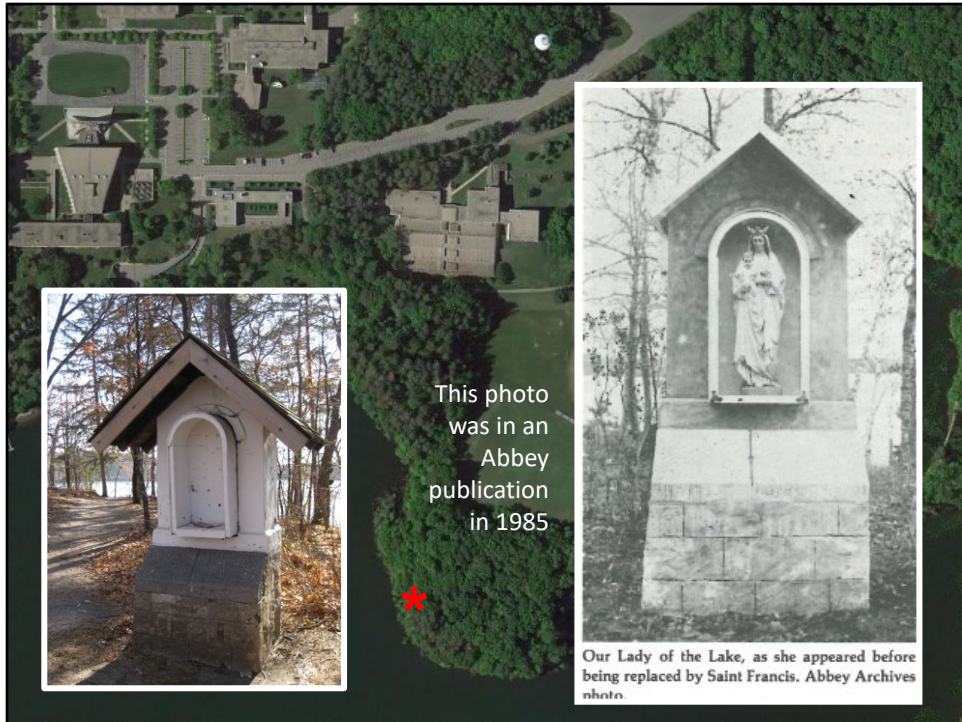


The image of the Annunciation was created by Dietrich Spahn, the same artist who did the stained glass in the 2007 Stella Maris Chapel renovation.

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Photo on left (empty) by the archivist Nov. 11, 2011

Photo on right by the archivist, Nov. 7, 2019 The stained glass image was created by Dietrich Spahn, the same artist who did the stained glass in the 2007 Stella Maris Chapel renovation. (See Mullin, Michael. "[Stella Maris Chapel renovated and blessed](#)," *Abbey Banner*, Fall 2009, v. 9, n. 2, p. 9-10, <https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/24454>, and "Upgrades to the Stella Maris Chapel Trail" photo in the *Abbey Banner*, Winter 2019, v. 19 no. 3, p. 35, <https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/49644/rec/2>.)



When I was first investigating its history, years ago, I found this photo of it in an Abbey publication, with a statue of “Our Lady of the Lake, as she appeared before being replaced by Saint Francis.”

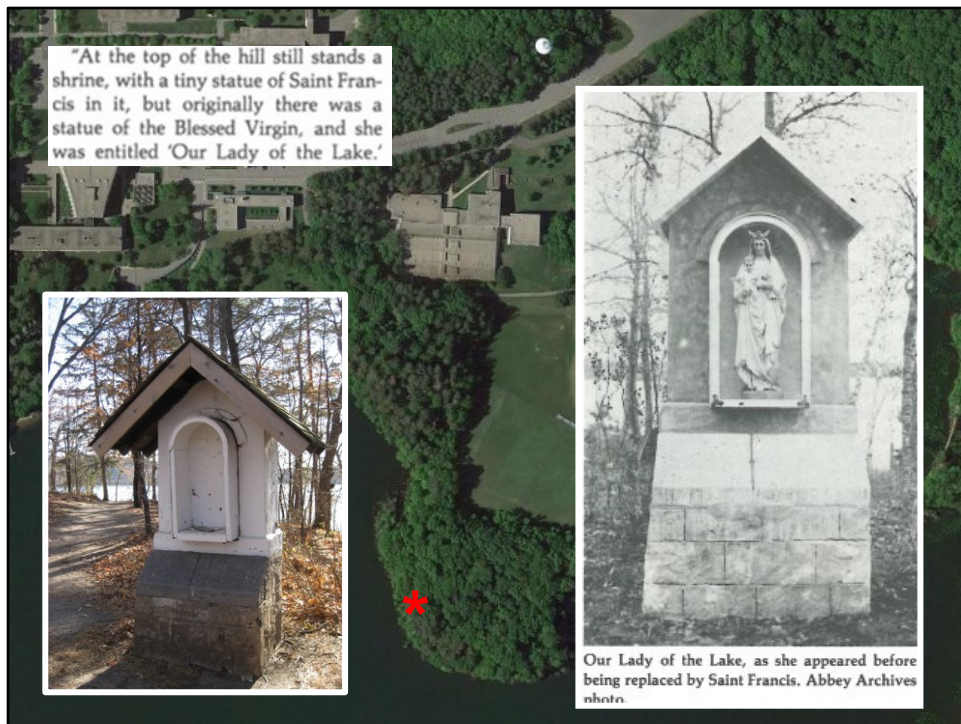
[Google Maps](https://www.google.com/maps/@45.5787345,-94.3909658,652m/data=!3m1!1e3?hl=en) <https://www.google.com/maps/@45.5787345,-94.3909658,652m/data=!3m1!1e3?hl=en>

Empty in 2011 (Nov. 11, 2011 photo by the archivist)

Photo on right by the archivist, 2019

Image on right: date unknown; printed in Angelo Zankl, OSB, article, “Round the Beat,” *Abbey Quarterly*, Jan.1985 p.3

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/19420/rec/2>



The article, in the *Abbey Quarterly* (the *Abbey Banner's* predecessor) was an accounting of a conversation between Fr. Alfred Deutsch, the *Quarterly's* editor, and Father Angelo Zankl, the oldest monk of St. John's. He said that this shrine, which then had "a tiny statue of Saint Francis in it," originally sheltered "Our Lady of the Lake."

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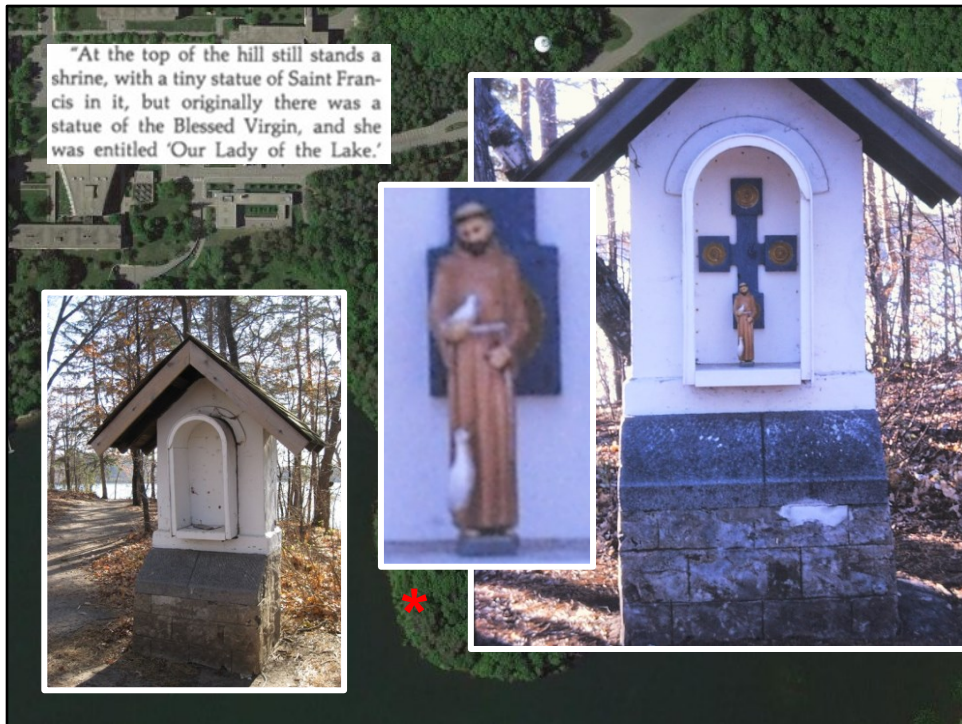
Empty in 2011 (Nov. 11, 2011 photo by the archivist)

Photo on right by the archivist, 2019

Image on right: date unknown; printed in Angelo Zankl, OSB, article, "Round the Beat," *Abbey Quarterly*, Jan.1985 p.3

Inset text also from Zankl article.

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/19420/rec/2>



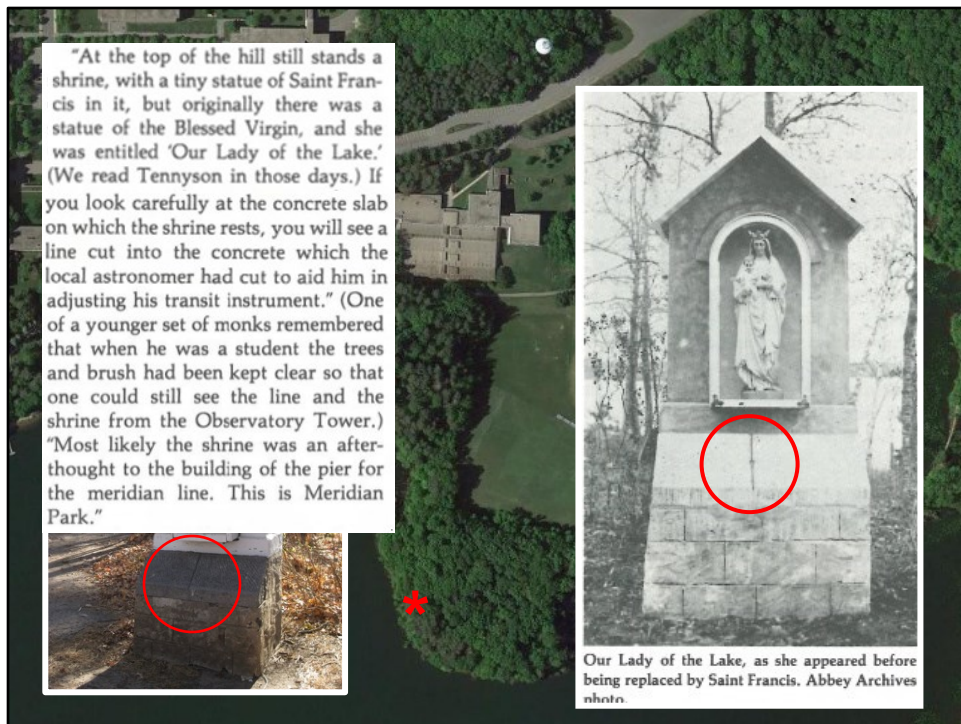
After a little digging, I located this photo showing the shrine in its St. Francis phase. But here's where things get really interesting...going back to Fr. Angelo's story...

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Photo: Meridian aka St. Francis Shrine on the Trail from SJAA.jpg

Inset text from Angelo Zankl, OSB, article, "Round the Beat," *Abbey Quarterly*, Jan.1985 p.3

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/19420/rec/2>



He said, “If you look carefully at the concrete slab on which the shrine rests, you will see a line cut into the concrete which the local astronomer had cut to aid in adjusting the transit instrument.” Fr. Alfred added that another monk remembered that, when he was a student, the trees and brush had been kept clear so that one could still see the line and the shrine from the Observatory Tower. Fr. Angelo said that the shrine was “most likely...an afterthought to the building of the pier for the meridian line.”

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Empty in 2011 (Nov. 11, 2011 photo by the archivist)

Photo on right by the archivist, 2019

Image on right: date unknown; printed in Angelo Zankl, OSB, article, “Round the Beat,” *Abbey Quarterly*, Jan.1985 p.3

Inset text also from Zankl article.

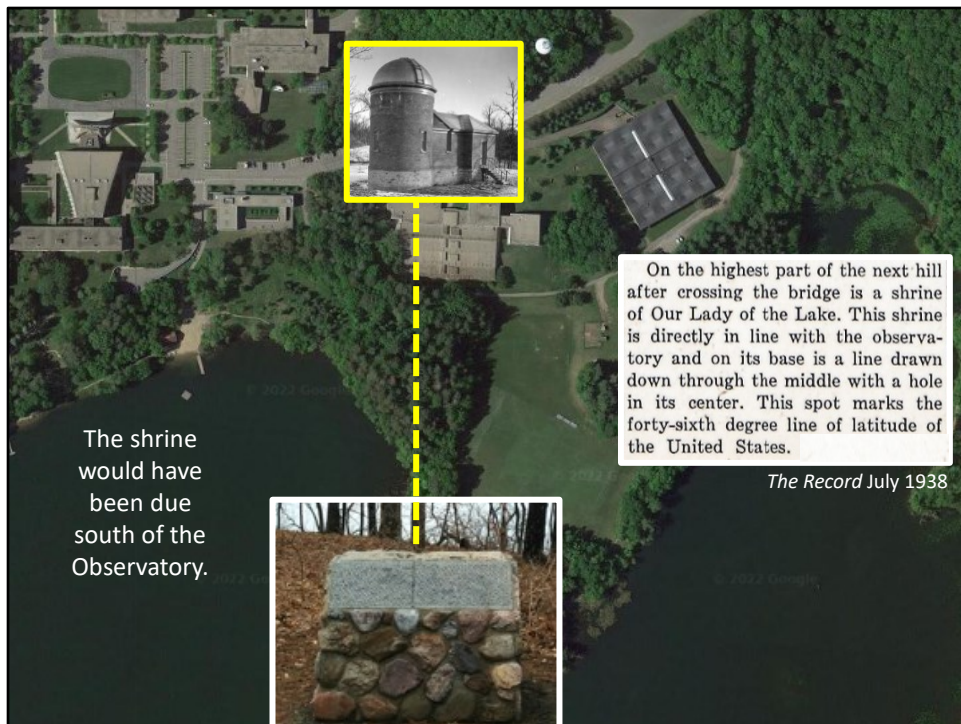
<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/19420/rec/2>



Looking north from the shrine now, the trees have grown to obscure the view that must once have shown the Observatory atop the hill.

An earlier history lesson about the Observatory explained that it was atop the hill where the Prep School is now, and was torn down when the Prep School was built. As the photo (on the right) looking north from the shrine shows, the trees have grown to obscure the view that must once have shown it atop the hill, where even the Prep academic building is now out of sight.

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651-756-9100



An article in a 1938 *Record* confirms what Fr. Angelo said. [Correction: Geocacher and Archives Assistant Liz Knuth later related that the 46th latitude is in fact the east-west line between Avon and Collegeville townships, between St. Wendel and St. Joseph townships, right under Cichy Lake (north of the Palaestra and the athletic fields).

The longitude (the north-south line) would be approximately W094 23'.]

[Google Maps](https://www.google.com/maps/@45.5787345,-94.3909658,652m/data=!3m1!1e3?hl=en) <https://www.google.com/maps/@45.5787345,-94.3909658,652m/data=!3m1!1e3?hl=en>

Photo on left (empty) by the archivist Nov. 11, 2011

Photo on right by the archivist, April 19, 2019

Inset text: <https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/28710/rec/23>

1938-10-06 p. 1 & 4, *The Record*

Here's one more image, from the 1923 yearbook, with the meridian line faint but visible. And here's a quote that ties one lakeside feature to another:

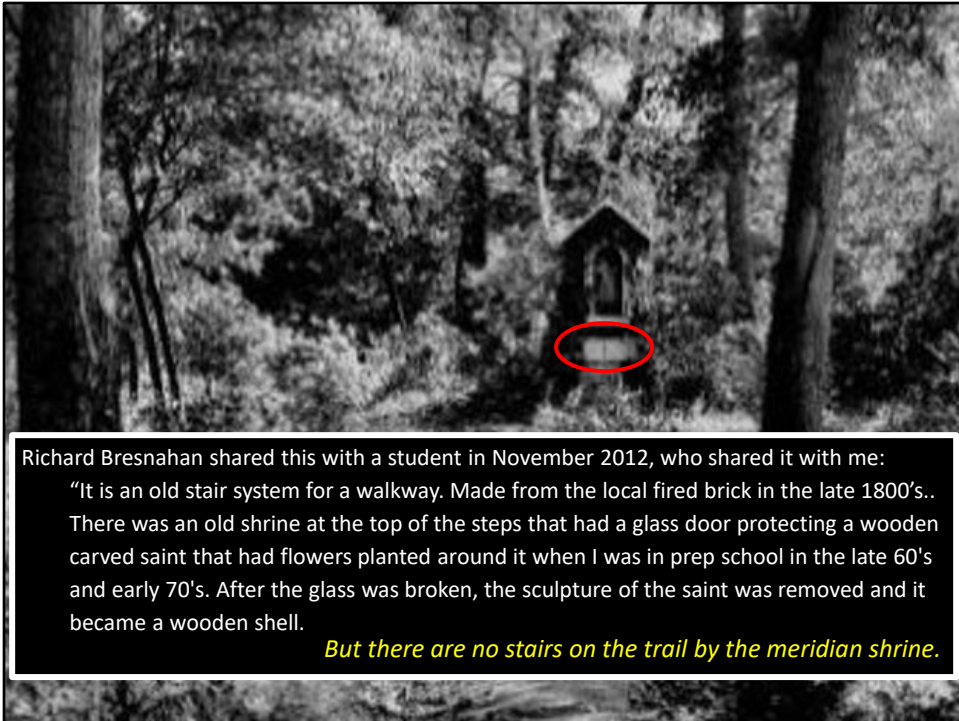


Richard Bresnahan shared this with a student in November 2012, who shared it with me:

There was an old shrine at the top of the steps that had a glass door protecting a wooden carved saint that had flowers planted around it when I was in prep school in the late 60's and early 70's. After the glass was broken, the sculpture of the saint was removed and it became a wooden shell.

Sounds like the meridian shrine, yes?

Here's one more image, from the 1923 yearbook, with the meridian line faint but visible. And here's a quote that ties one lakeside feature to another. It's from Richard Bresnahan, shared with me by a Prep student taking an archaeology unit from teacher Lance Nydeen. "There was an old shrine at the top of the steps that had a glass door protecting a wooden carved saint...when I was in prep school in the late 60's and early 70's. After the glass was broken, the sculpture of the saint was removed and it became a wooden shell." Sounds like the meridian shrine, yes?
1923 Sagatagan yearbook p18 Shrine in woods.jpg



Yes, until I share the rest of the quote, with another sentence and the beginning and end. "It is an old stair system for a walkway."... But wait, there are *no stairs* on the trail by the meridian shrine. And ...

1923 Sagatagan yearbook p18 Shrine in woods.jpg



Richard Bresnahan shared this with a student in November 2012, who shared it with me:
"It is an old stair system for a walkway. Made from the local fired brick in the late 1800's..
There was an old shrine at the top of the steps that had a glass door protecting a wooden
carved saint that had flowers planted around it when I was in prep school in the late 60's
and early 70's. After the glass was broken, the sculpture of the saint was removed and it
became a wooden shell. The whole thing deteriorated and was later thrown away. Long
memories of a past time." *But the meridian shrine is still there.*

**...the last sentence says that ".the whole thing deteriorated and was thrown away."
The meridian shrine has changed, but it has definitely not been "thrown away."
1923 Sagatagan yearbook p18 Shrine in woods.jpg**



That brings us to another mystery, this one on the other side of the peninsula, on Boniface Bay.

But that brings us to yet another mystery on the shores of Lake Sagatagan, this one on the other side of the peninsula, on Boniface Bay. [Google Maps](https://www.google.com/maps/@45.5787345,-94.3909658,652m/data=!3m1!1e3?hl=en)

<https://www.google.com/maps/@45.5787345,-94.3909658,652m/data=!3m1!1e3?hl=en>



Most Chapel walkers don't notice these features, but they were brought to my attention by Lance Nydeen's archaeology students at Prep.

A closer look shows some things worth investigating.

And I'm guessing most of you wouldn't notice, either, if this was your view while walking down the trail, as I did when I took this photo in 2019. But a closer look shows some things worth investigating, especially to an archaeology student---or an archivist!

IMG_20191107001.jpg



IMG_20191107001.jpg



IMG_20191107_164120.jpg



...and in the middle. Not exactly features of Mother Nature.

IMG_20191107_164101.jpg

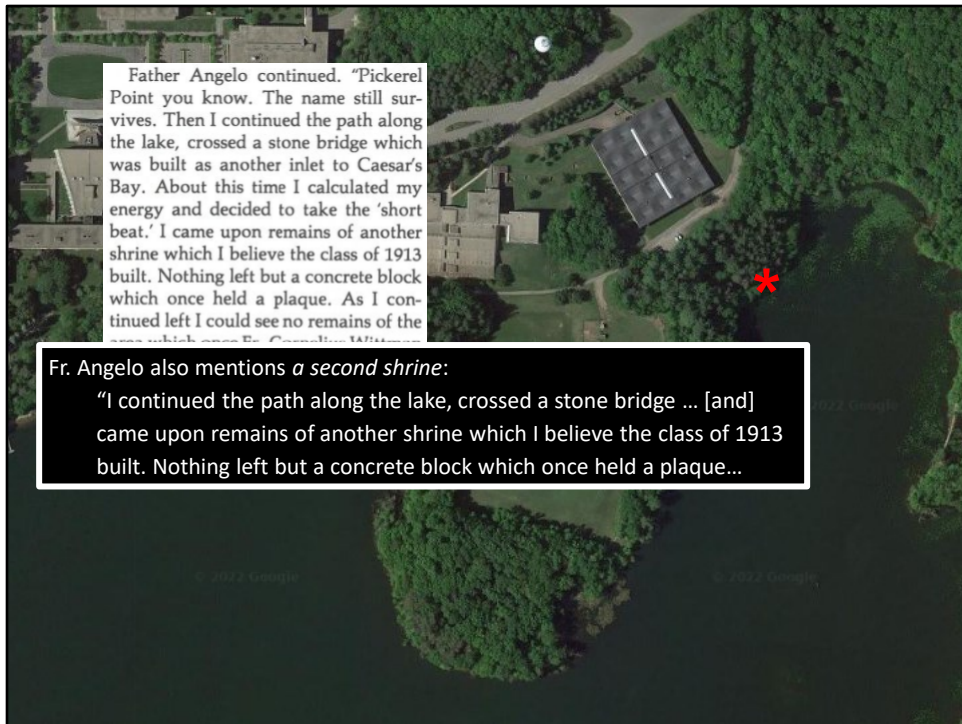


The stairs are even more noticeable in this 2012 photo

Thus began a years-long hunt to find out about "The Mystery Steps."

The stairs are even more noticeable in this 2012 photo, taken by that SJP archaeology student, who came to the Archives hoping to learn their story. Thus began a years-long hunt by yours truly and my assistant, Liz Knuth, to find out about what we came to call "The Mystery Steps."

The late Br. Andrew Goltz told me he thought he recalled a Chapel Walk wayside shrine where processions to the Chapel could stop for a prayer.
photo 2012 from Noah Ice-Cook.jpg



Father Angelo continued. "Pickrel Point you know. The name still survives. Then I continued the path along the lake, crossed a stone bridge which was built as another inlet to Caesar's Bay. About this time I calculated my energy and decided to take the 'short beat.' I came upon remains of another shrine which I believe the class of 1913 built. Nothing left but a concrete block which once held a plaque. As I continued left I could see no remains of the one which once Fr. Cornelius Wittman

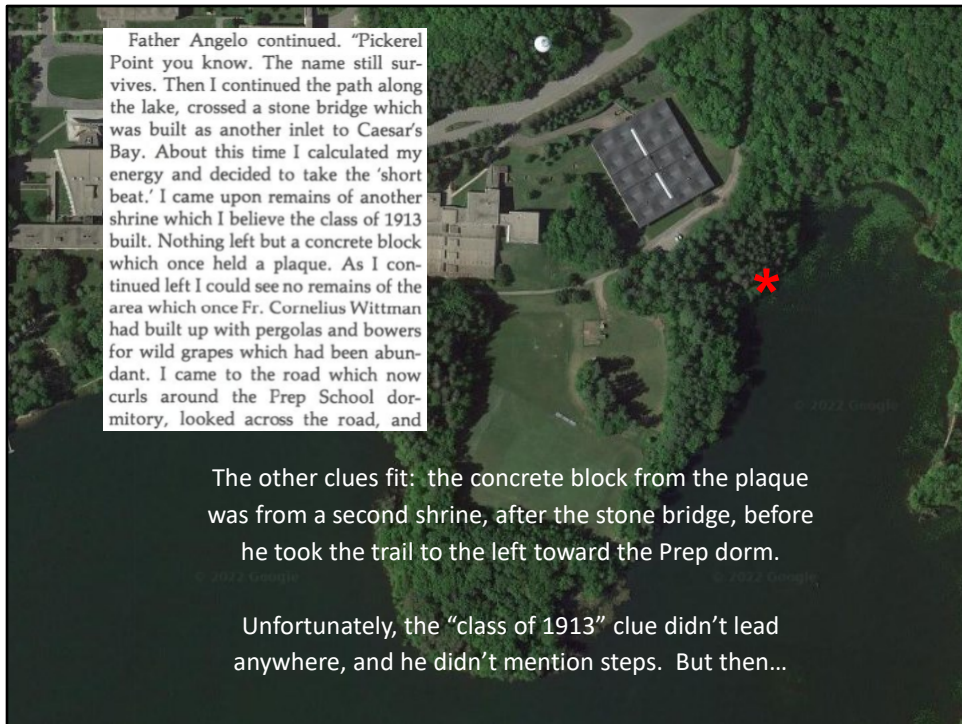
Fr. Angelo also mentions *a second shrine*:
"I continued the path along the lake, crossed a stone bridge ... [and] came upon remains of another shrine which I believe the class of 1913 built. Nothing left but a concrete block which once held a plaque..."

[Google Maps](https://www.google.com/maps/@45.5787345,-94.3909658,652m/data=!3m1!1e3?hl=en) <https://www.google.com/maps/@45.5787345,-94.3909658,652m/data=!3m1!1e3?hl=en>

January 1985 issue of the *Abbey Quarterly*, "Father Angelo: Touring the 'Short Beat'" p.3 <http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/19430>.



IMG_20191107_164101.jpg



Father Angelo continued. "Pickereel Point you know. The name still survives. Then I continued the path along the lake, crossed a stone bridge which was built as another inlet to Caesar's Bay. About this time I calculated my energy and decided to take the 'short beat.' I came upon remains of another shrine which I believe the class of 1913 built. Nothing left but a concrete block which once held a plaque. As I continued left I could see no remains of the area which once Fr. Cornelius Wittman had built up with pergolas and bowers for wild grapes which had been abundant. I came to the road which now curls around the Prep School dormitory, looked across the road, and

The other clues fit: the concrete block from the plaque was from a second shrine, after the stone bridge, before he took the trail to the left toward the Prep dorm.

Unfortunately, the "class of 1913" clue didn't lead anywhere, and he didn't mention steps. But then...

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January 1985 issue of the *Abbey Quarterly*, "Father Angelo: Touring the 'Short Beat'" p.3 <http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/19430>.



...in 2020, this post card photo came from the Abbey Archives, labeled "1918" on the back.

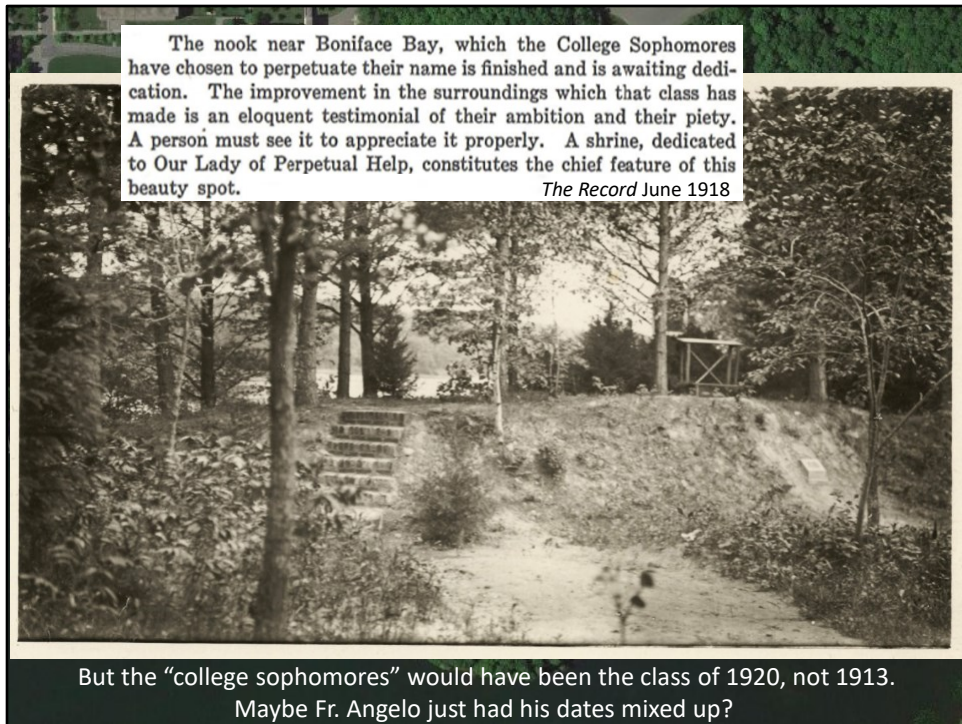
...in June 2020, in a box of materials from the Abbey Archives, Liz Knuth, Archives Assistant, found this post card photo, labeled "1918" on the back in pencil (above). Eureka! Note the *brick steps* (seven of them!), the lake in the distance, the *small plaque* on the right, the *kneeler above it*, and *what could be a shrine in front of it* (though it's hard to make out the features).

Mystery steps real photo postcard 1918 Misc Bldgs sect07 p7 no2.jpg



There is no doubt in our minds that this 1918 photo depicts the original site – which now features crumbling steps and a plaque base that are still visible more than one hundred years later.

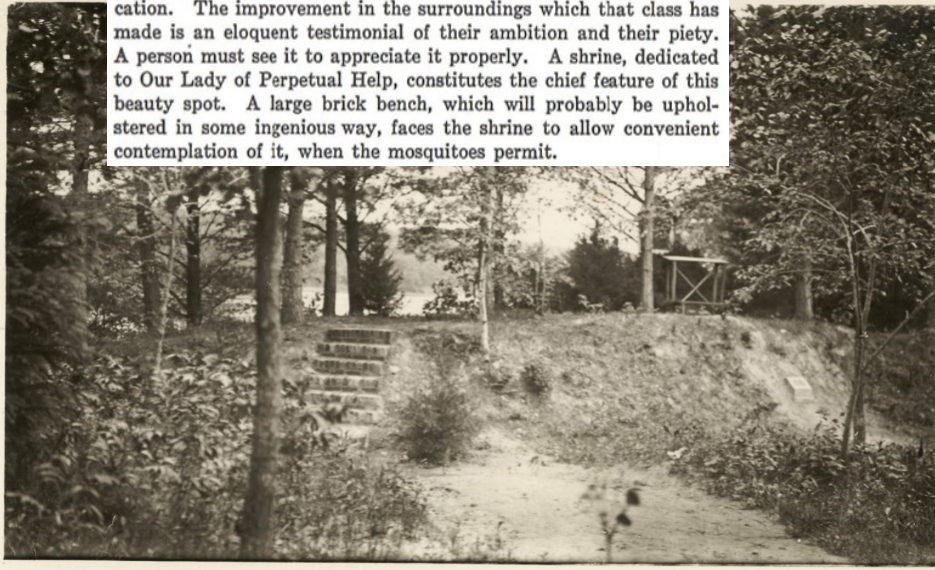
Mystery steps real photo postcard 1918 Misc Bldgs sect07 p7 no2.jpg



The 1918 photo date clue led to this tidbit in the June 1918 *Record*, saying that the College Sophomores had constructed a shrine near Boniface Bay, with a shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

Mystery steps real photo postcard 1918 Misc Bldgs sect07 p7 no2.jpg

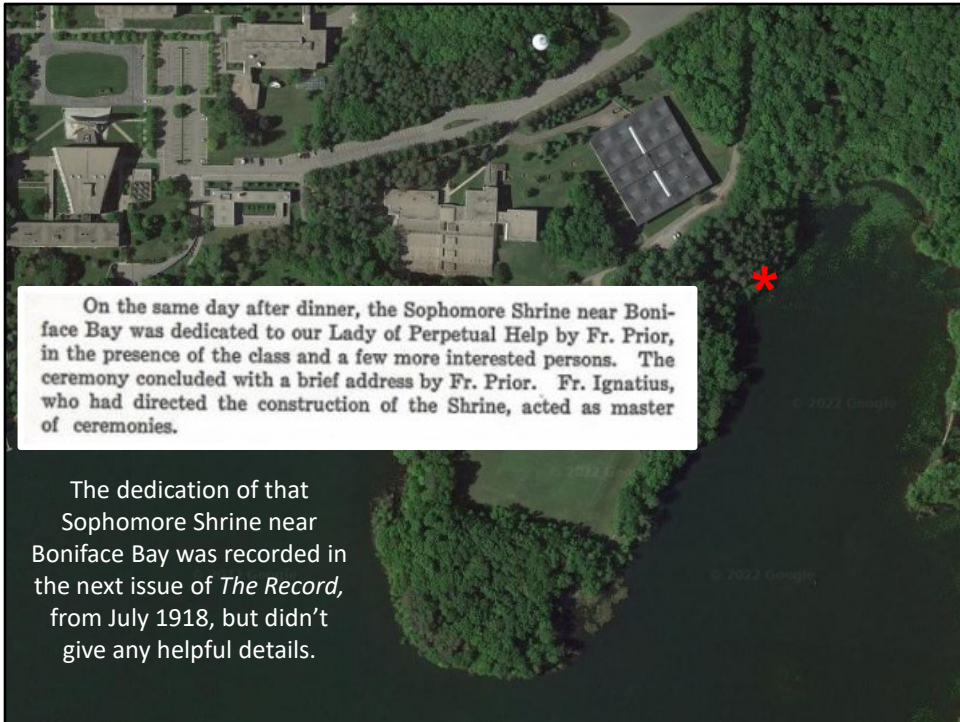
The nook near Boniface Bay, which the College Sophomores have chosen to perpetuate their name is finished and is awaiting dedication. The improvement in the surroundings which that class has made is an eloquent testimonial of their ambition and their piety. A person must see it to appreciate it properly. A shrine, dedicated to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, constitutes the chief feature of this beauty spot. A large brick bench, which will probably be upholstered in some ingenious way, faces the shrine to allow convenient contemplation of it, when the mosquitoes permit.



There is a wooden kneeler in the old photo, but no large brick bench – then or now.

And the paragraph's last sentence posed a new twist, indicating that there should have been "a large brick bench" in the photo as well.

Mystery steps real photo postcard 1918 Misc Bldgs sect07 p7 no2.jpg



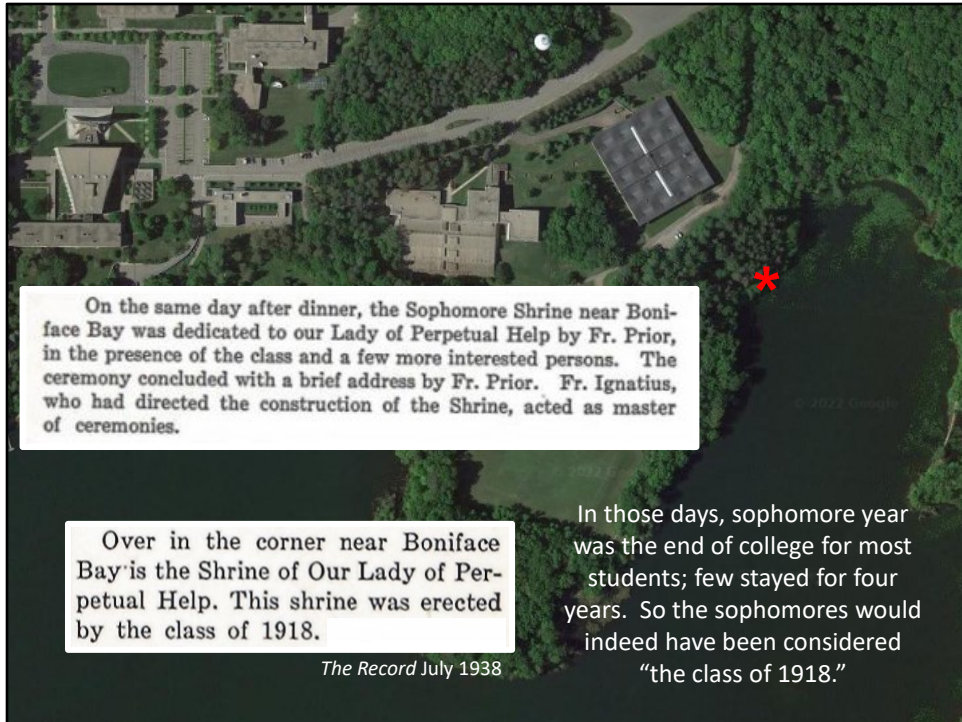
On the same day after dinner, the Sophomore Shrine near Boniface Bay was dedicated to our Lady of Perpetual Help by Fr. Prior, in the presence of the class and a few more interested persons. The ceremony concluded with a brief address by Fr. Prior. Fr. Ignatius, who had directed the construction of the Shrine, acted as master of ceremonies.

The dedication of that Sophomore Shrine near Boniface Bay was recorded in the next issue of *The Record*, from July 1918, but didn't give any helpful details.

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Text from *The Record* of July 1918, p. 410,

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/19340/rec/2>



But a new search to hunt for "Our Lady of Perpetual Help" led to a 1938 article in *The Record* confirming that the shrine was attributed to the "class of 1918." [Google Maps](https://www.google.com/maps/@45.5787345,-94.3909658,652m/data=!3m1!1e3?hl=en) <https://www.google.com/maps/@45.5787345,-94.3909658,652m/data=!3m1!1e3?hl=en>
Text from *The Record* of July 1918, p. 410,
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So the “large
brick bench”
remains a
puzzle, but the
mystery of the
“Mystery Steps”
seems to have
been solved!

Postscript: The book *Nature of Saint John's* book mentions, on page 66, “**a disintegrating brick staircase, once a shrine to Saint Aloysius Gonzaga.**” In follow-up communications with author Larry Haeg (the book is not footnoted), he thought that originated with Fr. Hilary Thimmesh, but Fr. Hilary did not recall it; he later emailed me saying “[You ask,] What was with the steps? It must have been a statue of somebody...”